

EDITORIAL

The First International Symposium on Venereal Diseases and the Treponematoses, sponsored by the World Health Organization and the Public Health Service of the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, was held in Washington, D.C., between May 28 and June 1, 1956. More than 600 participants, representing over thirty different countries, listened to about 170 papers in English, French, and Spanish, the three official languages of the Symposium. In addition, there were excellent exhibits summarizing recent activities in respect of yaws, the epidemiology of venereal syphilis, inoculation studies of syphilis in human volunteers, educational and control measures, penicillin reactions, the *Treponema pallidum* immobilization and complement-fixation tests, and a dozen films for lay and professional audiences. This medical marathon was only made possible by the skilled simultaneous interpretation over electronic translating equipment and the smooth organizational efficiency of many indefatigable workers headed by Dr. C. A. Smith, Chairman of the Programme Committee, and Chief, Venereal Disease Programme, United States Public Health Service.

The opening addresses of welcome given by several distinguished health administrators emphasized that venereal diseases and the treponematoses observed neither local, state, nor national boundaries, and that consequently control activities should also be carried out on a global basis. Study of the recent trends in several areas made it clear that the equilibrium of infection was unstable rather than static, and that a reduction in control activities occasioned by reduced budgets could be

reflected by an increase in early infections. The complacency of the last few years amongst those not actively in day-to-day touch with the problem has been shown to be misplaced.

A new concept emerged at the Symposium; it is becoming clear that control of the venereal diseases and treponematoses is not enough and that nothing short of elimination should now be our goal. Although the ambitious programme of papers did not permit time for official discussion during the sessions, valuable informal talks between participants went on over meals and often far into the night. Those of us who had previously visited the United States renewed old friendships and all made new acquaintances.

This International Symposium will have lasting value as a stimulus to further development of international interest and cooperation in the field of venereal diseases and treponematoses. One should be better informed about the special facets of the basic problem and the measures used in countries other than one's own. This Journal recognized the need for such an interchange of knowledge, and a year ago invited from leading venereologists in many countries a series of articles outlining the current position and practice in each country. Three such articles appear in the present issue from areas which illustrate the extremes of the problem. We hope that the series will be of interest to our readers in all countries and will contribute something to the better international understanding and cooperation which will be required if the goal of global elimination of the venereal diseases and treponematoses is eventually to be achieved.